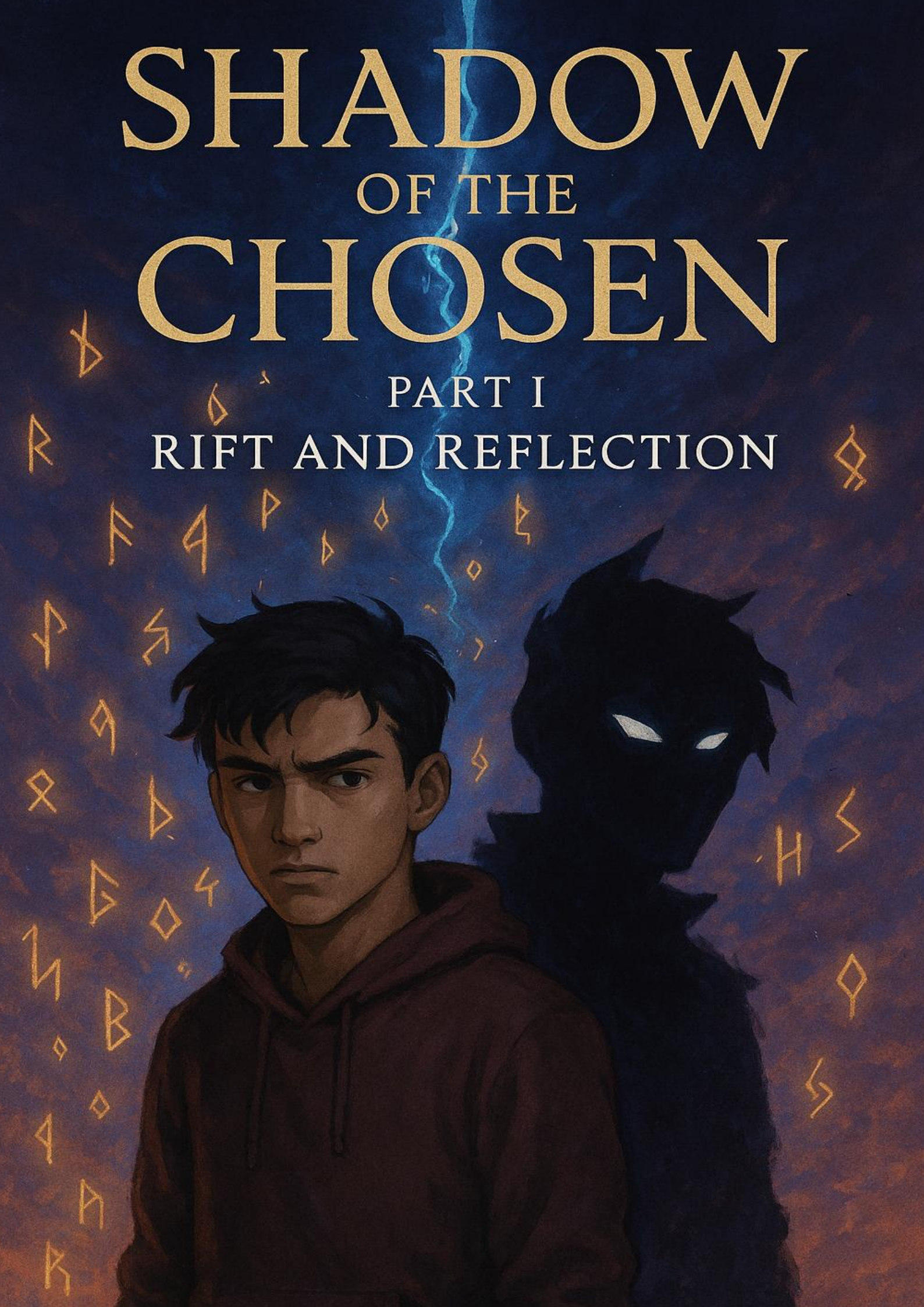
SHADOW OF THE CHOSEN

PART I
RIFT AND REFLECTION



Author's Note:

This is the original Shadow. I wrote this story because its something I imagined the world I want to live in should be like.some characters may be inspired but any similarity to real life characters is purely coincidental.

Shadow of The Chosen is a story I wanted to write but didn't have enough inspiration or incentive to write but 12th Board results and a breakup does the trick.

I may or may not publish this story depending on if this story gets completed.

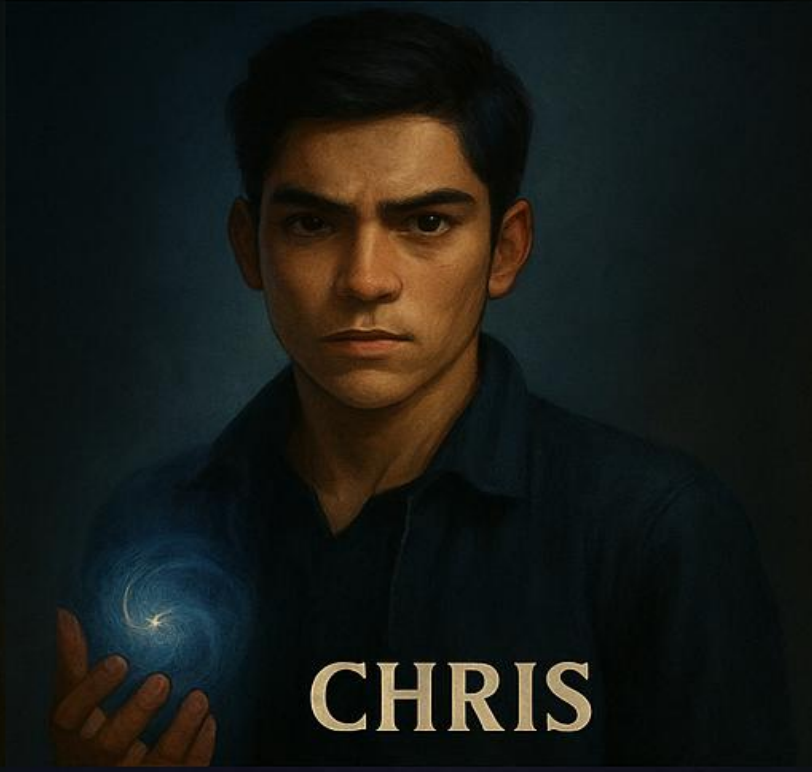
Special Thanks to that Gujju Friend from UK for being one of the first reviewers of this book of mine and another anime writer friend of mine to give me an idea on how to start with this.
Well if you Enjoyed this book, I might make more parts depending on me being alive on this Earthly Mortal plane :)

Adios

DEREK

SHADOW

SANIKA


CHRIS

ZOYA

AARAV

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Chapter 0: Echoes of the First Collapse

The world, as most knew it, was ordinary.

Seven continents. Fragile borders. Faith in gods long dead. Belief in science that explained everything, and politicians who explained nothing. Magic was for fiction shelves and movie screens — a thing of dragons and fairy tales, not taxes and weather reports.

But in dark corners of the internet, and older corners of forgotten libraries, there were rumours.

Of runes.

Not alphabets. Symbols.

Living ones.

Symbols that weren't drawn but *etched* into existence. On stones that bled warmth. On bones unearthed in caves never mapped. On fragments of metal older than any civilization.

In ancient Tibetan scrolls, they were called Sigils of Breath — the language of the world before it broke.

In West African oral myths, there were tales of Sky Tears — cracks in heaven through which gods had once fallen, leaving behind glowing words no man could read without going mad.

In a banned Russian forum post from 2003, someone claimed they had found a "soft space" in the Arctic — a place where time paused, and a rune hovered midair, pulsing like a heartbeat.

The post was deleted within an hour.

The user was never found.

They were always dismissed.

Crackpot theories. Conspiracy rabbit holes. Urban legends.

Because how could magic exist in a world where even miracles had a price tag?

But the truth lingered like a scar beneath the skin of the Earth.

It was never about magic.

It was about something older.

A language. A force. A memory.

One that remembered everything the world wanted to forget.

And for some reason, it began to awaken in places like Gujarat. Like Surat.

Where the soil hadn't forgotten.

Where something — or someone — had finally cracked the sea

June 4, 2025 was when the world saw it.

The first real crack in the sky.

The first rune hovering in broad daylight, glowing gold and humming with intent.

People called it a solar flare. A glitch. A hoax.

They were wrong.

It wasn't an arrival.

It was a return.

And this time, it wasn't looking for believers.

It was looking for survivors.

Chapter 1: June 4, 2025

Derek sat in the third row from the front, his eyes not on the blackboard, but on the cracked plastic casing of the wall clock above it.
11:59 AM. One minute to his seventeenth birthday.

Not that birthdays meant much to him anymore.

Behind him, someone was whispering about the new cricket tournament. Two seats to his left, Zoya was scrolling through her phone, probably editing another Instagram reel. A boy up front had just learned he failed in Chemistry, again. The teacher droned on about Newton's Third Law like the laws of physics still mattered.

Derek heard it all.
He simply chose not to care.

People were predictable. And predictability bored him.
He didn't need friends. He needed functionality. Everyone in his life stayed only as long as they were useful. That was the rule.

Only one thing mattered—**survival**.

He tapped his pen lightly against the desk, not from nervousness, but habit. His fingers were steady, his gaze distant. He'd memorized the timetable. He knew the lunch bell would ring in exactly sixty seconds. He also knew that when it did, he'd leave through the corridor's left exit, skip the mess crowd, and sit under the neem tree outside where no one bothered him.

But none of that would happen.

Because as the second hand neared the top of the hour, reality… shifted.

It started subtle—like heat distortion in the air, a shiver in the oxygen itself.
Then came the light.

The windows flashed violet. Not a flicker—**a pulse**. Like the sky had blinked.

Gasps rippled through the room. Someone shouted.
And then the sky outside the classroom cracked.

Literally.

It shattered like glass, lines of golden fissures branching out in every direction. Behind them wasn't blue sky anymore—it was black, ancient, and **carved with glowing runes** that looked like they'd been waiting to be seen.

The ground trembled.
The fan above Derek's head screeched to a halt.
The teacher collapsed, clutching his chest.

Some kids screamed. A few ran. Others froze.
Phones lit up everywhere. Panic. Photos. Live videos.

But Derek... didn't move.

His eyes weren't on the sky. They were on the reflection in the window.

His reflection.

Except… there was someone else in it now. Behind his shoulder.
A figure. A shadow. Its eyes gleamed faintly white.

Derek didn't flinch. He only tilted his head.

"Shadow," he whispered.

From inside his mind came a laugh. Cold. Familiar.
A voice no one else could hear.

"Happy birthday," it said.
"The world just ended."

And for the first time in seventeen years, **Derek smiled.**

Chapter 2: After the Pulse

Three hours had passed since the sky shattered.

By now, Surat was chaos.

The streets were jammed with cars honking in every direction. The police were overwhelmed. Schools had shut down mid-day. Temples filled with panicked worshippers. Hospitals overflowed—not just with the injured, but with the terrified.

But this wasn't local.

News anchors across the globe were broadcasting nonstop—Delhi, Tokyo, Nairobi, Cairo. Sky-cracks everywhere. Each fracture revealed different runes, different arrangements, but the golden glow was the same. No one had an explanation. Scientists speculated about gravitational anomalies. Religious leaders called it divine judgment. Conspiracy theorists uploaded blurry videos of "ancient spacecraft" and "dimensional gates."

Social media was flooded.

Hashtags like #RuneStorm, #SkySplit, and #Endlight trended within minutes. Memes of cracked skies and fake superhero awakenings went viral. But underneath the humour, a palpable fear crawled.

The world was terrified.

Everyone was terrified—**except Derek**.

He sat alone in his dark room, cross-legged on the floor.
The curtains were open, though the power had gone out hours ago. The only light came from the sky—still fractured, still glowing, still pulsing. The golden runes shimmered even when he closed his eyes. They weren't just in the sky now. They were **everywhere**. On walls. In mirrors. Beneath his skin.

They vibrated softly, like they were calling.

His phone buzzed next to him for the fiftieth time.

Aarav.

43 messages.
Most of them typed in panic. Some voice notes. One video showing the sky from his rooftop.

Derek didn't bother opening them.

"You're not going to answer?"
Shadow's voice curled through his thoughts like smoke, smooth and mocking.

"No," Derek replied aloud. His voice was calm, flat.

"He's not useful now."

"Cold," Shadow said with a grin. "But true."

A breeze stirred through the room, but the windows were shut. The air turned heavier—electric. The hum of the rune-laced sky grew sharper. The floor under Derek's palms began to thrum.

And then… it happened.

One of the runes—golden and faintly burning—**floated** through the glass. Not shattered it. Not cracked it. Just phased through it, like light through water.

It hovered in front of Derek's face, spinning slowly. Its edges bent reality around it, like the air itself was bending in respect. It wasn't large. The size of his palm maybe. But it felt **massive**, like it weighed more than the room.

Derek didn't move. He didn't flinch.
His heartbeat remained steady.

The rune stopped spinning.

Then, with no warning, it **slammed into his chest**.

A burst of gold shot through the room. The walls vibrated. The bed lifted slightly off the ground before thudding back down. Every object in the room flickered between shadow and light.

And yet, Derek didn't scream.

He didn't gasp.

He just… **smiled**.

"Finally," Shadow whispered in his ear, his voice deeper now. More real.
"Let's begin."

Outside, sirens screamed. Inside, Derek's eyes glowed faintly gold.
And the world shifted one degree closer to something it wasn't ready for.

Chapter 3: The Awakening

Derek jolted upright, drenched in sweat.

But it wasn't fear that gripped him. It was… **something else**.

Exhilaration.

Every nerve in his body buzzed like it had been rewired. His fingers trembled slightly—not from panic, but from suppressed energy. His skin felt charged, and when he looked down, he could see faint, golden lines pulsing beneath the surface of his veins like living circuits.

He stood slowly, legs shaky but steadying with each breath. The world was quieter now. Like it was waiting for him.

On his desk, the rune hovered mid-air. It didn't spin or glow violently. It… breathed. Expanding and contracting like a living organism, responding to his presence.

He reached out.

The moment his fingers grazed it, a **jolt** of raw energy surged up his arm, searing through his bones and spine. His vision flooded with images:

—An empire of floating cities suspended in golden clouds
—Dragons with circuitry etched into their scales like armor
—Humans wielding swords forged from memory and thought
—Voices chanting syllables that rewrote the laws of physics

And through all of it… **Magic**.

Not card tricks. Not illusions.
Real magic.

Primal. Ancient. Digital and divine.

He stumbled back, gasping. His eyes burned. When he looked into the mirror, his pupils were glowing faint gold, narrowed into slits like a hawk's.

"Shadow," he whispered, awe thick in his voice, "this power…"

"It isn't ours," Shadow replied, calm and low. "But it answers to us. For now."

Derek stared at his reflection. For a moment, he didn't recognize himself.

Then his lips curved into a grin—wild, cold, triumphant.

For the first time in his life, **Derek felt like the world owed him**.

And now… he had the tools to collect.

Chapter 4: Chris

Chris Rajan had always been in the background. Neatly pressed uniform. Top of every test. Head down, eyes ahead. No drama. No distractions.

And no friends.

Derek had barely paid him any attention before the Pulse. Chris was like a mirror in a hallway—always present, never important. But after the runes appeared, **that changed**.

Chris had adapted **fast**. Too fast.

His rune, silver instead of gold, allowed him to **manipulate time**—not full control, but bursts. Seconds stretched into minutes for him. He could pause moments, dodge danger, relive critical mistakes. It was terrifyingly efficient.

Teachers started listening to him. Students whispered about him. People began orbiting him like he was the centre of the new world.

Even Aarav, Derek's once-loyal errand boy, had switched allegiances.

Chris didn't ask for power. He just took it. And people followed.

"He's a better version of you," Shadow whispered one evening as Derek watched Chris from the rooftop of the library.

Derek didn't answer at first.

He saw how Chris moved—cold, sharp, precise. Like a chess piece that had learned to move diagonally. Everything about him screamed **control**.

"He's what I would've been," Derek finally said, "if I let go of emotion completely."

"So you hate him."

A pause.

"No," Derek muttered. "I hate that I still care."

Shadow said nothing.

But the silence felt… amused.

Chapter 5: Rift Zones

Within a week, the sky cracks had evolved.

They weren't just visuals anymore. They had become **Rift Zones**—warped pockets of reality where the laws of space, time, and logic twisted unpredictably. Some were small, like portals behind ATMs. Others consumed entire roads, playgrounds, or office buildings.

People called them *magic hotspots*.

But Derek knew better.

These weren't places where magic was born. These were **leaks**. Bleed-throughs from a world **older** than memory. A world not meant to exist here.

One Rift opened near the abandoned textile mill on the edge of Surat. Government barricades went up, but Derek didn't wait. He slipped through the fence that night, shadows wrapping around him like a second skin.

Inside, the air shimmered like oil on water. Every step echoed too long, as if sound itself was confused. Time lagged. The same drop of water seemed to fall twice.

At the heart of the Rift, suspended mid-air, floated a **crystal**—shaped like a human heart, pulsing with silver veins.

Around it, whispers danced.

They weren't in any language he knew, yet he understood them:

"Remember the betrayal…"
"The magic was stolen…"
"The cycle begins again…"

"What is it?" Derek asked aloud.

"A fragment of the old world," Shadow replied. "A piece of what came before humanity—before betrayal."

Derek felt drawn to it.

"Can I take it?"

"If you do," Shadow said grimly, "you can never go back."

Derek stepped forward.

And **took it.**

The moment his fingers closed around the heart, the Rift screamed. Not loudly—but in frequencies only souls could hear. The world bent. Light fractured. The crystal melted into his hand.

That night, Derek's dreams were filled with fire.
With runes.
With **something ancient calling his name.**

Chapter 6: Sanika

Sanika Desai was the first person who didn't flinch when she looked Derek in the eyes after the sky had cracked.

She didn't avert her gaze. She didn't whisper about him in corridors. And she didn't idolize him like Aarav or glare with quiet resentment like Chris. She simply… **watched**.

There was something unsettling about her calm. While others chased power, or panicked, or denied what was happening, Sanika seemed to understand the rhythm beneath the chaos.

"I can see echoes," she said the first time they spoke—under the old banyan tree behind the school. "Emotional ripples. People leave them behind everywhere. Like… footprints made of feeling."

Her rune, a pale blue crystal embedded in the skin above her eyebrow, pulsed softly when she spoke. Unlike most, hers hadn't fused with her body violently. It had merged with her **mind**.

Derek looked at her warily. He didn't like people who saw too much. And Sanika saw **too much**.

"You have two souls," she said.

He froze mid-step.

"What?"

"One that hurts," she continued, voice gentle but firm. "And one that hides. Which one are you?"

For a second, Derek didn't answer.

Then, flatly: "The one that survives."

Sanika tilted her head. "That's not an answer."

But it was.
At least, to him.
It always had been.

Chapter 7: Zoya and Aarav

If Sanika was the observer, Zoya Irani was the shield.

Literally.

Her rune had manifested as a barrier—a translucent, hexagonal force field that shimmered like molten glass. She could block anything with it: **magic, lies, even emotion itself**. Her power was control through **denial**. No one could get in unless she allowed it.

Derek respected that.

Aarav Patel, on the other hand, had gone in the opposite direction.

His rune gave him control over **frequency**—the vibrations of sound, air, even light. He could mimic voices, disrupt magic with noise, locate people by echolocation. A perfect scout.

But a terrible friend.

He now followed Chris.

"He's doing something," Aarav said when Derek confronted him near the canteen ruins. "Something big. He's building a team. Organization. Order. Maybe we should… all work together?"

Derek laughed. It wasn't warm.
It was razor-edged.

"You follow whoever holds the leash, don't you?"

Aarav flinched.

Before tension could snap, Zoya stepped between them. "Enough," she said. "This isn't about you two. Something's coming. My rune's vibrating like it's scared. I've never felt it this way before."

Derek's expression darkened.

"They're not ready," Shadow hissed from inside him.
"We are."

Chapter 8: The First Rift Boss

The Rift opened like a wound in the sky—right over the Tapi River.

Everyone thought it would be a monster. A dragon. A shadow beast. Something ancient.

It wasn't.

It was a **mirror**.

A massive, floating, polished mirror, suspended in a bubble of crackling air. It rotated slowly above the water, humming with magic that made everyone's skin itch.

The team—Zoya, Aarav, Sanika, Chris, and Derek—approached cautiously.

Then the mirror **activated**.

Each of them was forced to look into it.

Sanika saw a version of herself laughing while burning a house down. Aarav saw himself muting the world and watching friends die. Zoya saw herself turning her shield into a prison, sealing people inside.

Chris saw nothing.

Or maybe he saw too much to process.

And Derek—

Derek saw **Shadow**.

Not a reflection. Not a trick. But the **true version**. A Derek with pale skin, black-rimmed eyes, and a smirk that could kill.

"That's what they'll fight," the Rift whispered.

The fight broke out like a psychic earthquake.

Zoya's shield cracked on impact. Aarav screamed as sound ruptured his hearing. Sanika was thrown backward into the river. Chris tried freezing time—but the mirror fractured and multiplied his timeline, trapping him in loops.

Only Derek remained standing.

The mirror pulsed. "You are the darkness," it said.

Derek's eyes narrowed.
His hand clenched.
Golden veins surged beneath his skin.

"No," he whispered. "I **use** it."

And with a single strike—backed by rage, rune, and resolve—he shattered the mirror into a thousand shards.

The Rift groaned.

And vanished.

Chapter 9: The Name in the Stone

The crystal shard Derek had stolen from the Rift Zone had been dormant for days.

Then, one night, as moonlight slanted through the blinds, it **pulsed**. Not randomly—but in rhythm. With his heartbeat.

Derek sat upright in bed, the crystal cradled in his palm. Each throb of energy grew warmer… heavier. As if it was calling something out of him.

The air in the room thickened. The lights flickered.

And then, **the stone burned**.

Not with flame—but with **intention**.

It dropped from his hand, clattering onto the tile floor—and there, glowing red and smouldering like embers, a **name** carved itself into the ground beneath it:

DARHKSHADOW

Not *DarkShadow*.

Darhk—with an "h".

It didn't feel like a misspelling. It felt like a **scar**.

A whisper of horror.
A hollow scream.
A reminder that this wasn't just darkness—it was **what birthed it**.

Shadow stirred in his mind like a serpent uncoiling.

"That's me," he said, almost reverently.

Derek's fingers curled into fists.

"No," he replied. "That's what you want to become."

"I already **am**."

And for the first time…

Derek didn't argue.

Because somewhere deep inside, he knew

DarhkShadow wasn't just a future version of him.

It was his **inevitable** one.

Chapter 10: Memory Loop

Chris was obsessed with precision.

He needed things to make **sense**—especially his past.

So, when he discovered a small Rift that allowed entry into **memory loops**, he dove in without hesitation. His goal was simple: **relive old moments. Reroute the pain. Rewrite regret.**

But the Rift didn't cooperate.

Instead of viewing *his* memories, the Rift **twisted** the rules.

It bled open the minds of others.

He saw Zoya's guilt, screaming as her shield trapped someone she loved.

He saw Sanika drowning in echoes she couldn't silence.

And then he saw Derek. Alone. Splintered. Bleeding not from wounds—but from betrayal. The moment Shadow was born.

Chris clawed at his head, screaming, "Make it STOP!"

The Rift responded with silence.

It was Derek who pulled him out, hand gripping his shoulder, voice low.

"You can't change the past."

Chris, eyes wide with horror, just nodded.

"But I can stop becoming that in the future."

They sat there, side by side, in the cracked grass outside the Rift.

That was the **first** time they didn't hate each other.

Not completely.

Chapter 11: The Echo in the Mirror

The auditorium had been abandoned since the Pulse. Glass hung jagged from windows. Stage lights dangled like nooses.

And in the centre of the stage stood another Rift.

But this one was **different**.

It didn't twist time. It didn't show memories.

It showed **versions**.

Alternates.

Reflections of the same souls… raised under different stars.

When Derek stepped forward, he saw a boy who looked like him—same eyes, same height—but without Shadow.

That version was smiling. Soft. Gentle.

Dead.

Slaughtered in a world without survival instincts.

"He never created me," Shadow whispered. "And he was too weak to live."

Chris saw himself commanding people… saving cities.

But he died screaming. A martyr to a system that used him.

Sanika stepped forward… and saw **nothing**.

No echo.

Just **absence**.

"It's like I never existed," she whispered.

"They're us," Zoya said quietly, looking at a version of herself leading an army.

"No," Derek said. "They're who we could've been—**if we were allowed peace**."

And silence followed like a storm cloud.

Chapter 12: The Architect's Code

That night, every rune in the sky **activated**.

Golden lines laced across the horizon like veins across a giant's skin. They converged and shifted, forming complex geometries and constellations never charted by science.

Sanika stood atop the school's broken dome, eyes glowing, whispering to the wind.

"It's not a message," she murmured. "It's a **map**."

The patterns didn't form words—they formed **coordinates**. Markers. A celestial circuit board stretching across the world.

"The Architect's Code," she finally said. "The framework of an old civilization. The original Qi civilization."

"So it's a defense system?" Aarav asked.

She shook her head.

"No. It's a **test**."

Derek's brow furrowed. "Test for what?"

"To see who is **worthy** of surviving the next collapse."

Aarav looked up at the shifting sky. "And what if no one is?"

Shadow's voice cut through like ice.

"Then we create someone who is."

Derek clenched his fist.

All the runes in the sky shimmered—**as if they heard him**.

Chapter 13: Bloodlines

Zoya's family wasn't attacked by monsters.

They were attacked by **neighbours**.

By people who had shared tea with her parents, laughed with her cousins—now throwing bricks at their house, painting "MAGIC MURDERERS" in red across the gate.

The anti-magic protests had begun.

Society was splitting.

The Pulse hadn't just brought runes—it had cracked the world's illusion of control.

Zoya stood in Derek's room, her arm in a sling, a cut trailing down her cheek.

"They think we're the enemy," she said quietly.

"We are," Derek replied, without even looking at her. "To their idea of order."

"They're afraid," she said again, voice trembling.

"Good."

Zoya turned her face away. Her fists trembled.

But she didn't walk out the door.

She stayed.

Because deep down, she knew—**he wasn't wrong**.

Chapter 14: The Reality Tear

It was not a Rift.

It was a **tear**.

A jagged wound in the sky above Surat, too vast, too **loud** to be natural. The air turned electric. Light fractured like shattered mirrors.

Everything stopped.

Time froze. Cars hung mid-turn. Pedestrians locked in place.

Only two figures moved.

Derek and Chris.

They stepped forward together, past the petrified chaos, toward the gaping wound.

Inside it… was the **future**.

The city burned. Shadows, not like the ones from Derek's mind, but literal **crawling horrors**, slipped from corpses and devoured light.

Floating above it all was a **throne**. Forged from twisted rune shards.

And on it sat **DarhkShadow**—his skin pale, his veins glowing black, and his eyes two endless voids.

He looked directly at Derek.

And smiled.

Chris whispered, "You're going to become that?"

Derek didn't answer.

But Shadow, from within, **laughed**.

Chapter 15: The One Who Knows

In the dead centre of a collapsing Rift, where the sky bled sideways and gravity pulsed in waves, they found **him**.

An ancient being, blind but glowing.

Floating a foot above the cracked ground, surrounded by runes that wrote themselves in mid-air.

He called himself **The Last Architect**.

"You aren't meant to survive this," he said in a voice like falling dust. "You're meant to be **reborn** by it."

Derek stepped forward.

"What is Shadow?"

The Architect tilted his head. The floating runes changed shape.

"A survival spell," he replied. "Born not of power—but of **pain**."

Derek clenched his jaw. "Then why does he keep growing? Why does he want **more**?"

The Architect smiled—a tired, knowing smile.

"Because **you** do."

And just like that, the Rift collapsed, swallowing the Architect whole.

Leaving silence.

And the echo of

' A truth no one wanted to hear… '

Chapter 16: When Derek Fell

It was supposed to be a routine Rift extraction.

A ruined temple beneath the city. Faded runes. Muted echoes. They moved cautiously.

But halfway in, Derek vanished.

One blink—he was there. The next—gone.

Panic erupted. Zoya and Aarav screamed. Chris cursed. Sanika knelt, palms on the ground, trying to feel for his emotional trail.

"He's not here," she said. "He's **inside** something. Somewhere deeper."

They found him hours later.

Lying at the centre of a circular rune spiral. His eyes open but glassy. His breathing shallow.

The runes around him whispered.

Inside his mind, he stood on a cliff of obsidian thought—facing Shadow.

"You keep blaming me," Shadow said. "Blaming me for being born."

"You're the rot," Derek spat. "You're what I fight."

"No," Shadow replied. "I'm what you **became** when you decided it was safer to cut off **love** than feel pain."

Derek shook, rage rising.

"I saved us!" he shouted.

"No," Shadow said gently. "You just locked the pain in a better cage."

Derek screamed.

When he awoke, he said **nothing**.

Not for two days.

He just sat by himself.

And Shadow… was quiet, too.

Watching *and waiting*

Chapter 17: Rise of the Variants

The Rifts no longer followed logic.

They bled through at random—unravelling not just space, but **identity**.

And from them stepped the **Variants**.

Not creatures. Not monsters.

People.

Alternate versions of themselves.

Chris with red eyes and no remorse. Zoya with cracked shields and scars on her soul. Derek—cold, crowned, and already merged with Shadow.

Some asked for help.
Some begged for death.
Most brought destruction.

Zoya cut down a Variant Chris who laughed as he died.

Chris faced his own Variant in silence—until the copy said, *"You're not strong enough to become me."* And then Chris drove a rune blade through his heart.

Derek watched both events unfold without blinking.

"They're not evil," Sanika said softly. "They just survived… differently."

Derek's voice was quiet, but sharp. "That's the worst part."

He turned his gaze to the mirror-version of himself that hadn't attacked—just watched from a distance.

"So did I."

Chapter 18: Merging

The largest Rift opened above Dumas Beach.

The sky rippled like fabric, the stars behind it rearranged into runic constellations. Lightning arced in golden spirals. Runes whispered like wind.

Derek stood at the edge of it all.

Inside him, **Shadow** pulsed—like a second heart, a darker echo of his soul.

"You know what this is," Shadow said.

"The final line."

"Merging doesn't make me evil," Derek replied. His voice held no fear. Only truth.

"You're not some demon."

"You're *me*. The part that refused to die when I was left behind."

Shadow was silent.

Then..

"…Then let's become one who never has to."

And for the first time, they didn't resist each other.

They **accepted**.

And the rune in Derek's chest turned black and gold.

Chapter 19: Chris Breaks

He wasn't supposed to feel anything.

Chris had built his entire life on control. On perfection.

But the Variant Rift showed him his **childhood home**. Not as it was now—abandoned and burned—but as it once had been.

Warm.

Whole.

His parents alive. His bed made. His trophies still glinting under warm lamplight.

And a version of himself—**smiling**. Happy. Human.

He stayed too long.

When he emerged, the Rift closed behind him like a coffin.

Later, Derek found him sitting alone under a tree, knees pulled in, hands shaking.

"I was never loved," Chris whispered.

"Not the way I needed."

Derek didn't speak right away.

He just sat beside him.

"Neither was I," he said finally.

And they stayed like that. Quiet. Not friends.

But **no longer alone**.

Chapter 20: The Night Before War

The Final Rift pulsed in the sky like a heartbeat.

Below it, runes etched themselves into the earth. The wind carried whispers in a dead language. Magic had come alive—and it was watching.

They all knew what was coming.

A battle not just of power—but of *identity*.

Zoya sat beside her mother, holding her hand without words. The apology hung unspoken, but understood.

Aarav recorded a voice note, uploaded it nowhere, then deleted it.

Sanika opened a notebook and scribbled names—names of those they'd lost, names of those she still wanted to remember. She hesitated before writing "Derek."

Chris polished his blade. His reflection stared back at him—this time, he didn't look away.

And Derek?

He stood on the school rooftop, eyes closed, the runes in the sky reflected in his irises.

"Shadow," he said.

"I'm here."

"Let's finish this."

Lightning struck the horizon.

And the **last Rift began to open**.

Chapter 21: Fractured Reflections

The Rift pulsed like a heartbeat as they stepped through.

But they weren't stepping into some alien realm.

They were back at **GD Goenka International School**.

Or... something that wore its skin like a costume stitched with memory and dread.

The hallways stretched too long. Desks floated, suspended midair like insects in amber. The ceiling dripped ink. Every window showed a different sky. And lining the walls—**mirrors**.

But they didn't reflect the now.

They showed *them*—twisted, broken, evolved.

Chris leading an empire of clockwork soldiers. Zoya with obsidian wings forged from rune-shields. Sanika with her eyes sewn shut, yet *still seeing*.

And Derek—smiling on a throne built from shattered versions of himself.

"We've entered a Variant Hub," Sanika whispered, touching a mirror's edge. "These aren't illusions. They're **echoes of choices**."

Footsteps echoed behind them—measured, cold, deliberate.

Out of the rippling shadows stepped **Derek**.

Or... what could've been.

Older. Taller. Clad in runes that pulsed black. Eyes pitch black—no whites, no pupils, only void.

"Hello, myself," he said, voice like gravel cracking on fire. "Still calling yourself Derek? I go by something else now."

Zoya stepped forward, shield gleaming.

"**DarhkShadow**," she said. The name tasted like smoke.

He grinned.

"So, my reputation bleeds well."

And the mirrors shattered.

Chapter 22: The Riftwalkers

Chris's time-freeze bought them a single minute.

Enough to **run**.

The Rift spat them into **The Between**—a realm that wasn't a place, but a sensation. A great twilight expanse, webbed with floating platforms, each pulsing with forgotten moments.

Time spiralled like a double helix. Memories drifted like fog.

They were looking for the **Heart of the First Rune**—a crystal rumoured to control Riftlines. A chance to stop everything from collapsing.

But Derek was unravelling.

He stood at the edge of a platform, staring into endless dark.

"You saw him," he said to Shadow. "You *were* him."

"No," Shadow answered softly. "He was what you would've become… if you had stopped pretending to care."

"What if that *is* me?"

"Then you're closer to peace than you think."

Chris stepped forward, his voice edged with urgency.

"We need to end this. Seal the Rift. Before *he* bleeds through again."

Zoya nodded. "Or before more versions of *us* do."

But Derek's hands trembled.

He wasn't afraid of DarhkShadow.

He was afraid that **a part of him wanted to become him**.

Chapter 23: Clash of Echoes

They reached the **Bridge of Fracture**, where all timelines wove into one.

And it was waiting.

The Heart of the First Rune floated above the altar—but it wasn't unguarded.

It was **guarded by them**.

Twisted echoes stepped from the Rift-fog. Sanika gasped. Zoya's shield sparked.

A **battle** began.

Zoya fought her future self—her Armor dented, her eyes cold. Each strike they exchanged carried years of regret.

Aarav faced a mute version of himself, one who used sound like knives and had forgotten how to speak.

Sanika stared down a version of herself with glowing skin and dead eyes—someone who traded her sanity for vision.

But Derek… saw no one.

Until Shadow stepped forward.

Not a voice. Not an echo.

A **body**.

Taller. Cloaked in black runes. No face. No warmth.

"You merged," Derek said.

"I *was* everyone else," Shadow replied. "Now I'm finally home."

They fought—not with blades, but with **memories**.

Derek remembered being left behind in Class 10.

Shadow forced him to relive it—frame by frame.

"I was born the moment you cut love from survival," Shadow said.

"You made me… to protect what was left."

Derek's knees hit the bridge.

“You’re not just my darkness…”

“No,” Shadow said. “I’m your **proof** that you never needed anyone.”

Chapter 24: The Collapse

Reality **snapped**.

Rifts opened like cracks in glass. Worlds bled through. Surat shook like it was caught between two dreams.

Zoya saw her mother again—speaking a language Zoya had never learned.

Aarav wept, then began humming a tune from a childhood that wasn't his.

Chris's runes malfunctioned—time slipping, stuttering, reversing in micro-loops.

And Derek saw a thousand versions of himself—

—Some cold.
—Some kind.
—All *alone*.
All **survivors**.

"See it now?" Shadow whispered from deep within.

"Love is weakness. Feeling is weight. Only those who sever themselves survive."

"I don't want to become you," Derek whispered.

"You already did," Shadow said.

"The difference is—I'm proud of it."

Chapter 25: Cost of Closure

The Heart of the First Rune floated at the **Convergence Point**—the place where all Riftlines met.

But sealing the Rifts came at a cost.

Sanika traced the glyphs. Her voice trembled.

"To stabilize our world… another must fracture. Permanently."

Silence.

Then Chris stepped forward. "Let it be mine."

Derek pulled him back.

"No."

"Why?" Zoya asked.

"Because every version of me that lived… did so by letting others *die*."

"I won't add another."

He stepped forward.

The rune glowed gold.

And Derek screamed—not in pain, but in *release*.

Shadow roared inside him, trying to escape, to split again.

But Derek didn't let go.

"You're not separate anymore," he said. "You're part of me. And I'm the one choosing."

Light burst from his chest.

The Rift closed.

And the world… held.

Chapter 26: Until the Chaos Returns

Weeks passed.

Surat stitched itself back together.

People rebuilt. Tech rebooted. Runes stopped glowing.

But the silence left behind wasn't peace.

It was **pause**.

Zoya no longer smiled when she shielded children during drills.

Chris timed everything—his words, his walks, even his blinks.

Sanika wrote names in a notebook—then crossed them out, one by one, as if waiting to forget.

And Derek?

He sat on the school rooftop again.

The same rooftop where it all began.

A flickering golden rune glowed faintly on his palm. Shadow was quiet now.

Not gone.

Just... *watching.*

He looked up at the sky.

It was clear.

Until it **wasn't**.

Far across the horizon, another rooftop. A boy stood there—his coat red, his hair white, a **red rune** burning in his hand.

He **waved**.

Then disappeared in a flicker of violet light.

…….

And so, Book 1 ends.

There is not just one ending to this.

The danger still lingers—hidden between comrades, buried under silence and survival.

And across the Rift, in another timeline…

Another Derek opens his eyes, LOOKS AT YOU……

And smiles.

THE SKY BROKE. MAGIC RETURNED. AND SO DID HE.

On June 4, 2025, the skies over Surat shattered—
runes glowing with forgotten power descended,
waking ancient forces buried in humanity's blood.

To some, it was a miracle.
To others, the end of the world.

But for Derek Malhotra, it was personal.

Seyenteen. Disconnected. Dangerous. Derek doesn't crave power—he survives on instinct. And inside him lives a darker truth: Shadow, a fractured self born of betrayal, pain, and a refusal to feel.

When the runes fuse with Derek, they awaken not just magic, but memories he buried to stay sane.

Now, as Rift Zones tear open reality and alternate versions of themselves emerge, Derek must fight alongside those he doesn't trust—and against the one version of himself he fears the most: Darkhadow.

In a world where the enemy might be your own reflection, where pain becomes power and survival has a cost: Derek must face the one question he's never dared to ask—
What if the monster isn't Shadow? What if it's him?